DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 085 974 EC 060 965

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TITLE	Yours--For a Better Workshop!
INSTITUTION	Michigan State Univ., East Lansing. Regional Instructional Materials Center for Handicapped Children and Youth.
SPONS AGENCY	Bureau of Education for the Handicapped (DHEW/OE), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	Oct 71
NOTE	17p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*Exceptional Child Education; *Inservice Teacher Education; *Program Planning; *Special Education Teachers; *Workshops

ABSTRACT

The booklet contains suggestions for planning and conducting an effective inservice teacher-training workshop for special or regular classroom teachers. Considered are ways to communicate with teachers; set objectives; promote active participation, discussion, variety, and respect for participants; organize; provide models and clear directions; establish schedules; and meet unexpected situations. Other components of an effective workshop involve suitable physical surroundings, expertise, procedures for observation, and topics that serve teachers' needs. (MC)

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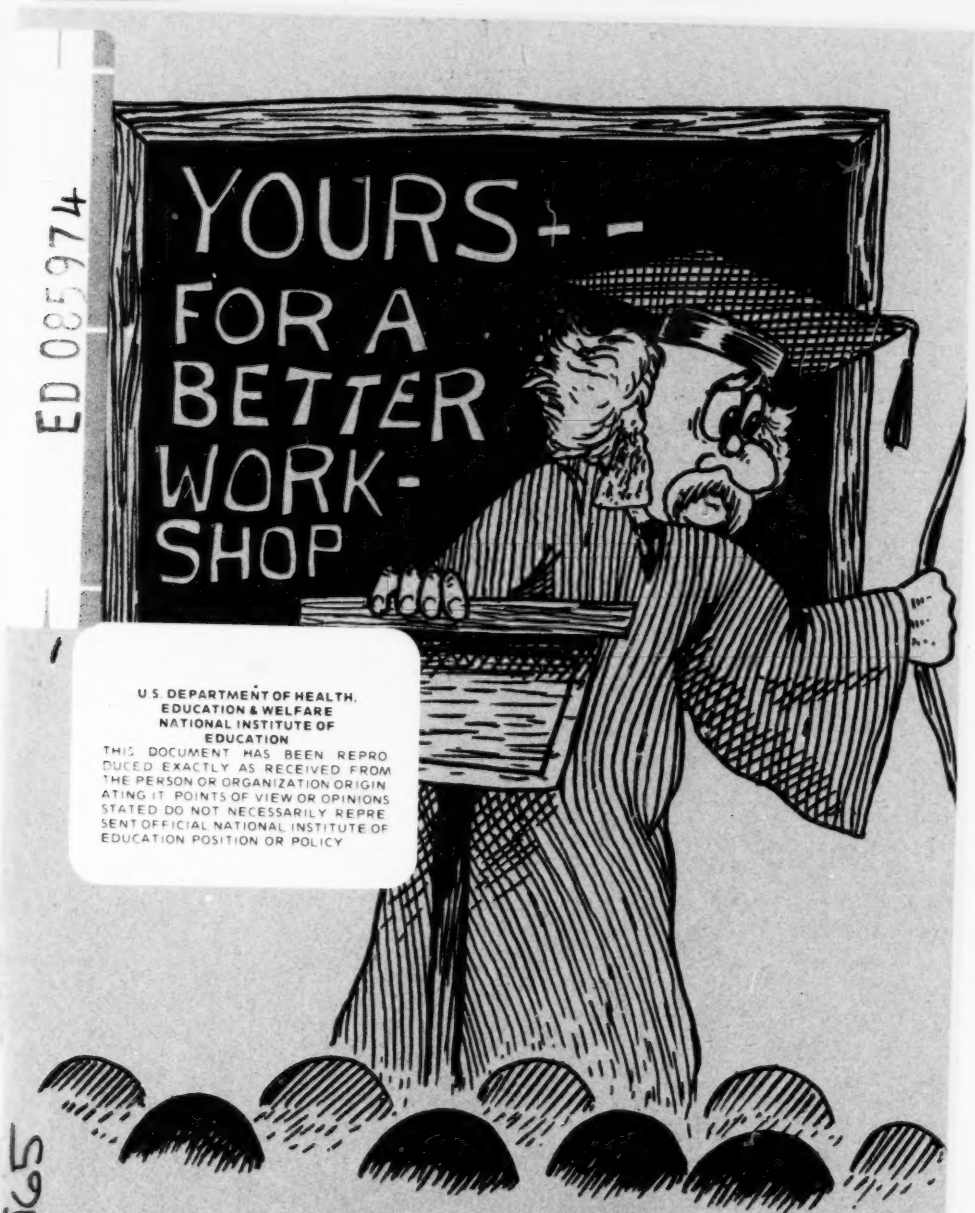

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This booklet was prepared by the USOE/MSU Regional Instructional Materials Center for Handicapped Children and Youth in cooperation with the Special Education Service Area, Michigan Department of Education. The material presented herein was developed pursuant to a grant from the U. S. Office of Education, Bureau of Education for the Handicapped. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the U. S. Office of Education and no official endorsement is implied.

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Drawings by: DENNIS PRESTON

October, 1971

YOURS – FOR A BETTER WORKSHOP!

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YOURS – FOR A BETTER WORKSHOP!

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Here are some hints that can be useful in planning and conducting an effective teacher-training workshop. Most in-service workshops are active processes of communication and interaction. Thus it pays for the workshop leader to put to work some good strategies for communicating and interacting. The real trick in the design of a workshop is to include the best uses of the right strategies! Hopefully, this booklet will help you design and prepare a really top-notch workshop. To make the best value from the booklet, you should use it to plan and also in assessing what has gone on at a workshop. This will help in refining plans for future workshops.

COMMUNICATING WITH TEACHERS

In-service education is concerned with the matter of communicating with teachers about the means **they** can use to communicate with pupils. The first thing to remember is that the way you communicate with teachers at a workshop becomes, for some of them, a model for communicating with their pupils. If you use a lecture approach you are, in effect, suggesting to the participants that they should **lecture** to their pupils. And it doesn't really solve the problem when you tell them to do as you **say**, not as you **do**! The tendency is for teachers to teach as they were taught. Thus you must be

concerned with the **content** of your workshop **and** with the way in which you **communicate** the content.

A teaching message is shaped by the medium that is used to communicate it. When a particular instructional technique is presented to teachers through a medium other than that suggested by the technique itself, we find that understanding of the technique becomes confused. For example, when a clever motion picture is used to demonstrate team teaching, we find that the discussion following is concerned with the techniques used for the filming rather than the content of the film. Team teaching gets lost in the shuffle! The participants are more tuned to the medium than to the message that the medium is trying to convey. If, instead, a workshop actually **used** team teaching to "tell the story" about team teaching, the medium and the message support each other. Effective communication with teachers calls for the medium and the message to be consistent with each other, and to mutually support each other. Thus, if you are interested in communicating about new uses of motion picture film, the means to use (the medium) would be a motion picture film. If you are interested in demonstrating a new discussion technique you should utilize the new method of discussion that you are trying to share. Thus, effective communication about teaching should involve that very teaching procedure to demonstrate itself, if at all possible.

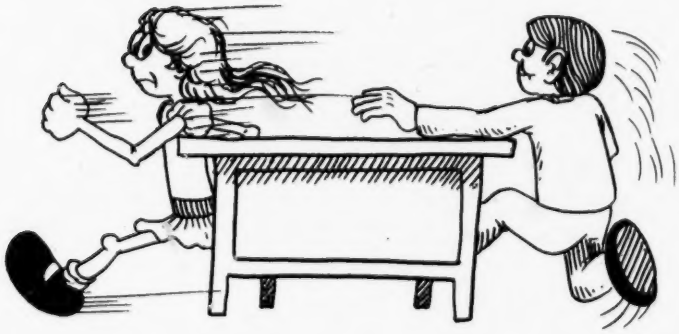
KNOW YOUR OBJECTIVES

If the leader isn't sure where he would like the participants to go (i.e. what they should achieve) there is a very low probability that they will get there. The leader and the participants must understand the objectives and see how the workshop and the materials can logically contribute to these objectives. Sometimes the objective of a workshop is less to teach a procedure or an understanding than to explore the meaning of a problem and to gather viewpoints and insights. When this is the case and the objective of the workshop is thus of an exploratory nature, then the leader must make sure that the participants understand this. Whether the objectives are for skills or shared opinions, there is a greater probability that the participants will achieve them if they know what they are!

One of the underlying motives in most workshops is to help the participants set goals for themselves. People will not set goals for themselves simply because you give opportunity. They have to become motivated to do so, and they likely need guidance or help. Your example in having and sharing goals and your willingness to involve the participants in subsequent goal-setting activities are important steps. Thus, especially if you want others to learn to set goals for themselves, there is no substitute for clearly thought through goals and objectives of your own.

ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

Obviously a certain portion of any workshop is devoted to talking. Or, as is often the case, lecturing. When a lecture is in progress there is only one really active participant—the lecturer. Increasing the number of people who are taking an active part in the workshop also increases the number of people that will leave with your message. (Don't jump to conclusions, we aren't suggesting that everyone should start lecturing!) We're aiming for participation through activities that call for everyone to take part in an active manner. Participants should truly be **participating.**



Design the activities so that the participants can receive the message through the activity and not be entirely dependent upon you and your personality for receiving the message. When good teachers work with pupils they attempt

to make learning an active situation. There is a higher probability that the desired learning will occur when encountered in an active manner. Design your workshop as you would like teachers to design for their students!

A standard rule of thumb is if there is to be a passive role for learners, it should come **after** an active period. Involvement, first; passive roles second. Save your own "messages" for the end. Never start in a passive mode.

PROMOTE DISCUSSION

Never try to start a discussion session by saying "now let's discuss it". Instead, start discussing the matter yourself and involve others by inviting other opinions and comments as you go along. As soon as momentum picks up reduce your own role to a minimum. Discussion is a sweeping function. You don't turn it on or off. It's either there or it is not there. The best way to get it started is often with substantive questions.

Try to avoid "yes" or "no" questions. Unless, of course, you are ready to immediately follow the short response with a related substantive question.

"Why?" is a good word to remember while stimulating a discussion. A leader's "why?" to a participant's unsupported point can often save a discussion from degenerating into a bull-session.

VARIETY

The longer you expect a group of people to work together, the more variety there must be in what they do while they are together. We understand this idea very clearly in terms of children; yet, in fact, it applies to all learners. (Be sure that you think of the participants at your workshop as **learners.**) Different types of activities, all related to your objectives, can keep the participants alert and active in their learning. Participants will not regard two hours of role-playing as having variety, even if each role-playing represents different characters. A role playing situation, along with a discussion, a movie, and a game is more likely to be perceived as having variety. In other words, the message may be the same but the medium is varied.

RESPECT THE PARTICIPANTS

Operate in such a manner that you show the participants you respect them. Be aware that they can make or break you as a leader! Approach your group with a great deal of respect for what they can do to you as well as enthusiasm for what they can do **with** you! (Not fear, but respect.) Communicate your respect by sharing your intentions, sharing your goals, honoring and respecting people by listening to them, and being flexible within limits. There is such a thing as loosing respect if you let yourself get pushed around by every little thing that comes up.

ORGANIZATION

A well-organized workshop is thought-through well in advance. Sometimes educators attempt to run off-the-cuff workshops; they seldom achieve their objectives. If you would like the participants to feel you are at ease and comfortable while directing the workshop, take the necessary time to plan exactly what you will be doing at each step. The best way to insure a casual presentation is through detailed planning. Only through good planning can you have the luxury of making immediate changes as they are needed. Good planning allows you to sit back and observe the interaction of participants and spot the places where your intervention is needed and where your plan can be "tuned up" on the spot.

Take seriously the organization and management problem. You have two separate functions to carry out: The first is **planning**. This entails the design, the procedures, the approaches, and most important—the goals. Planning a workshop calls for elaborate "lesson planning"! The second function of organization is **preparation**. This means that you will have all the right things at the right place at the right time. A workshop that is well **planned** and well **prepared** shows that the leader is interested in the participants. The leader has made a real investment—himself!

Through organization you will be able to reduce the **fatigue factor** so often associated with workshops. Sometimes tasks and jobs that should have been the responsibility of the

leader end up being done by the participants. Arranging chairs, preparing materials, and the budgeting of time are properly chores for the leader. When a person attends a play he doesn't expect to help in the construction of the stage props! At a workshop, the participant does not expect to carry out organizational details that are the responsibility of the leader. You must assume that the participant has come to your workshop to learn. Your job, then, is to fulfill this expectation in the most direct and unencumbered manner.

Be realistic in the amount of material that you expect to cover in your workshop. A leader adds to the fatigue factor by attempting to cover too much material. Scheduling extra sessions in the evening or longer sessions during the day is one solution; reducing the amount of material you hope to cover is another. If you can't fit it into an acceptable and scheduled time for the workshop, delete some of the material.

MODELS

We often provide models of behavior for participants. Make sure that when you provide a model you also provide alternative models. There is a great tendency to adopt models without thinking through alternatives. Participants will often expect the leader to provide the "perfect" way of doing something. This is often impossible for the leader. Besides, it assumes that there is one correct way of doing something! By providing alternative models the participants will better understand that they must make choices in order to find the procedures most appropriate for themselves.

TIME SCHEDULING

Establish a time schedule for your workshop and stick to it (within reason and sensitivity). There is nothing more frustrating for participants than a time schedule that is not followed. Carefully think through the activities that will be

conducted at the workshop and accurately assess the amount of time needed for each. If you are in doubt, add some time–but never provide too little time.

If you establish a time-orientation at the very beginning of your workshop the participants will come to expect you to stay on schedule. If, in turn, you stay on schedule they will learn to make the best use of available time. Without a clearly defined time schedule there is a great probability that the participants will spend inordinate amounts of time on petty tasks. Participants like to feel productive. A clearly outlined schedule promotes productivity.

PROVIDING CLEAR DIRECTIONS

There is no substitute for clear directions in helping the participants to achieve the objectives of the workshop. Attempting to provide verbal directions off-the-cuff almost always leads to confusion. Prepare yourself with clear and concise **written** directions for any activity prior to the workshop. When writing directions, have someone else read them to judge their clarity.

When you want the participants to listen to the reading of some directions, make sure that no other activity is going on to distract them. In particular, do not pass out any reading material while giving directions. The visual distraction will surely interfere with the verbal presentation.

An effective procedure for communicating clear directions is to provide both oral and visual directions. Prepare a copy of the directions for each participant. Then read the directions aloud while the participants are also looking at the directions. A general rule is to ask for questions at the end of the directions in order to provide clarity where needed.

If an overhead transparency is used in conjunction with printed directions, make sure the transparency is identical to the printed material. Participants can then choose to either look at their printed directions or direct their attention to the projected transparency. If they are identical, there will be no concern for "missing" something that is not on the transparency.

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

The leader of the workshop should be alert to the participants at all times. People at workshops seem always to be doing the unpredictable! The more inclined you are to predict that they will all do a certain thing, the more apt you are to be surprised. You must expect the unexpected and be sensitive to it. Good workshop planning and organization allows for the unpredictable. Good planning does **not** mean that everything has been predetermined to the exclusion of

individual needs and differences. You must be able to expect and be sensitive to those times when you must veer from your plan.

PHYSICAL SURROUNDINGS

Carefully go over the plan for your workshop and select physical surroundings that will enhance rather than detract from the workshop. Ample lighting, seating and work space should be provided so that the participants can engage in the workshop activities in a comfortable manner. If a blackboard or overhead projector is needed, make sure it is there in the room. And, if you are using an overhead projector, don't forget the projection screen! (Carry an extra "3-pole to 2-pole plug adapter" in the glove compartment of your car; they are crucial and usually missing!)

Make sure the room is arranged in the way you would like it to be used, before the first participants arrive. A well-organized room sets the stage for a well-organized workshop. It shows that you care! Roll a few "mod" posters or "graffiti" panels into a tube to take with you and add a last-minute touch of nuance to the environment.

EXPERTISE

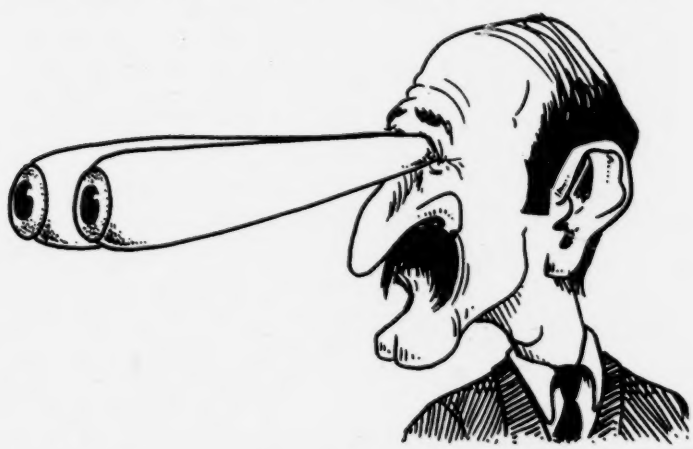
Be an expert in what you are saying. The participants expect this of you and it is a role that you must assume. To be expert does **not** mean that you flaunt knowledge in the face of the participants. To be an expert means that you truly understand the topic area and are willing to communicate it to others. Protect your integrity–don't present opinions as facts–but don't be shy about responsible professional opinions.

Prior to the workshop it is a good idea to go over in your mind (better on paper!) the questions that might be asked by the group. Be sure you have meaningful answers to these questions. Don't try and fool people into believing that you

know something you really don't! Don't try and communicate something you don't understand. Take time prior to the workshop to gain a more full understanding of your topic.

OBSERVATION

A good workshop includes some procedure whereby you can "step back" and observe what is going on. Sometimes a leader will design himself into a trap; he gets so involved and the action depends so much on his dominant leadership role at every step that it is impossible for him to truly observe what is going on. A well designed workshop allows the leader time when he is free of any direct input responsibility. The leader needs to be able to survey calmly what is going on and



thereby to plan any revisions that might be needed during the remainder of the workshop or for future workshops.

A well-planned and organized workshop has times for the leader to observe and reflect built in just prior to each point in the workshop where decisions are to be made about alternative routes to be taken. Through observation the leader assesses the group and decides on the best alternative.

RESPECT THE NEEDS OF THE GROUP

Develop your workshop in response to observed or reported needs among the teachers with whom you are working. Be certain that topics for workshops are directed toward concerns and needs of the teachers. Never conduct a workshop "for the fun of it".

When assessing teachers' needs, be sure to look at **perceived** needs and **real** needs. Sometimes the perceived needs of teachers are not their real needs. The real needs are those which most closely affect the learning of the pupils. Sometimes it takes a pair of workshops: one to help teachers learn more about themselves and the needs of their pupils, another to make plans and develop the basic skills to meet those needs!

In-service workshops can be fun. When teachers learn and have an enjoyable experience at the same time you know that your workshop is a winner!

You're on!